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ABSTRACT

This curriculum outline introduces the components of a course which explores the genre of short novels, including works by twentieth-century Japanese and Chinese authors. First, the catalogue course description and required texts are presented, highlighting the instructor's historical introduction to the development of Western, Japanese, and Chinese fiction, their distinct traditions and characteristics, and the emphasis on learning by contrast. Next, the course objectives are introduced, focusing on understanding the historical and cultural contexts of the assigned works, expressing students' thoughts, understanding and respecting cultural and aesthetic traditions, appreciating short fiction as an art form, and expanding students' reading and viewing experience through various viewpoints of others. The writing assignments are then described, emphasizing a focus on literary analysis, student creativity and initiative, self-evaluation, and class attendance and participation. A list of the college's official student academic rights and student academic responsibilities follows. The tentative schedule of the course is then provided, detailing lectures and assignments. Contains a selected annotated bibliography. (TGI)

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ENGLISH

"ASIAN SHORT FICTION"

Use In: The Short Novel

BY

SUSAN WAUGH

Asian Studies Instructional Module

St. Louis Community College at Meramec

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THE SHORT NOVEL
ENGLISH 213

St. Louis Community College at Meramec
spring 1997
TTH 12:30-2
3 credits
SO 109

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catalogue course description:

Some of the greatest fiction is neglected because of its length--too long for short story collections and too short to be included in courses on the novel. This is the short novel or novella--a distinct literary type. Students in this course will study works by such writers as Melville, Tolstoy, Baldwin, Dostoyevsky, Chopin, Conrad, Faulkner, Porter, Wright and others.

instructor's elaboration on course description:

This course explores works of short fiction. This semester the course will include three short novels by twentieth-century Japanese authors and three by Chinese authors. Though this course focuses on understanding and enjoyment of the literature, this semester will bring the short novel's "roots" into strong focus.

Western and Japanese fiction developed their distinct traditions in very different contexts. When Japan reopened to the West in 1853, after 250 years of seclusion, those contexts began to interact. Western fiction became the overwhelming influence on Japanese fiction--though it has never lost its "roots."

Through most of its history, China has influenced other cultures and not the other way around. China developed the world's first writing system and, by any measure, has the longest literary tradition. Poetry and storytelling have been equally important in different ways. A high level of literacy, measured by strenuous examinations, was required of candidates for the Imperial bureaucracy. In this century, as with Japan, the Western novel has made deep impressions on China. The novels, however, remain distinctly Chinese.

Since people learn much by contrast, this semester should be an especially rich experience for those who enjoy fiction.

required texts: from Europe and the Americas:

The Norton Introduction to the Short Novel, Second Edition, edited by Jerome Beaty (Norton)

from Japan:

Fumiko Enchi, The Waiting Years
(Kodansha International)

Yukio Mishima, After the Banquet
(Berkeley Medallion)

Natsume Soseki, Kokoro
(Gateway Editions)

from China:

Yan Mo, Red Sorghum: A Novel of China (Penguin)
Zhang Xianliang, Half of Man Is Woman (Ballantine)
Wang Weizheng, Recluse of the Heavenly House
(Panda Books, Beijing)

course objectives:

1)to experience and enjoy the assigned works and to develop understanding of their historical and cultural contexts

2)through short (2-page) focus papers, mid-term and final essays, and class discussion, to become increasingly clear, articulate, and confident in expressing one's thoughts and feelings about the assigned works

3)to understand and respect cultural and aesthetic traditions--our own and others, and to meet each one on its own terms, rather than only in comparison with what we already know

4)to understand and appreciate short fiction more deeply as an art form, including its relationship with film adaptation of fiction; to understand and appreciate the Japanese short novel's roots in puppet theater, kabuki, poetry, fiction and non-fiction; to understand China's short novel roots in historical epics, poetry, shadow puppetry and opera; to understand and appreciate the short novel's relationship with human story-telling

5)to enlarge and enrich one's reading/viewing experience through understanding (or at least respecting) the various viewpoints of the authors--and especially of one's classmates; to learn that which can only be learned through a group process

6)to grow as readers, viewers, writers and human beings

writing assignments:

1)A short (2-3 page) focus paper is due almost every week. This paper should be analysis, not summary, of the short novel we are about to discuss. The idea is for you to clarify ONE idea about a work, to bring it into clear focus and to articulate it fully, with specific references to the text at hand; please use examples; footnotes are not necessary, but please use page references where appropriate

2)mid-term and final essays to be written out of class, topics having been developed in consultation with the instructor; with student creativity and initiative encouraged

grades:

Individual papers will not be graded. Students will participate in a self-evaluation process, with final grade by mutual consultation. Generally speaking, an A indicates superior written work and contribution to class discussion, a B indicates superior work in one or the other (and at least above-average work in the other), and a C indicates some substantial effort in the class, not a mere trying to slide through. Any student concerned about his/her work possibly not meriting a C should talk with the instructor before the withdrawal date. There is also the "audit" option.

important notice: Woody Allen said that 90% of life is showing up. St. Louis Community College policy states that an instructor may fail a student who is excessively absent, which in the case of this course means missing more than four classes. This policy will be enforced. Written work is expected on time.

Please also show up when you are reading: you will enjoy the short novel much more if you are completely present to it. Please show up in class--physically and mentally--even if you have not completed the assigned novel. Above all, a fruitful course depends on courtesy, mutual respect and honest effort to understand each other among class members (and instructor). Let us all do our best.

Please review the official "Student Academic Rights" and "Student Academic Responsibilities" lists below. Feel free to discuss them with me in class, on the phone, or in my office.

STUDENT ACADEMIC RIGHTS

1. Access to scheduled class meetings and appropriate instructional and support service.
2. Right to a syllabus describing course objectives; units of subject matter to be provided; evaluation procedures; major course requirements such as term papers, book reviews, field trips and weekly reports; and rules of attendance, grading and conduct.
3. Right to have instruction that begins promptly; is presented in a clear and concise manner; and provides relevant, structured activities consistent with the contact hours of the course.
4. Right to have classroom instruction, assignment, and evaluation that are consistent with the general course description and the specifics of the syllabus.
5. Right to be treated in a humane, ethical and professional manner both in the classroom and in all communication and contact with the instructor.

STUDENT ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Responsible for selecting a program of study that is consistent with his/her interests, skills and abilities.
2. Responsible for selecting courses that are consistent with his/her program objectives and readiness level.
3. Responsible for enrolling for a schedule of courses in accordance with the time and effort he/she will allocate to academic requirements.
4. Responsible for being punctual and attending classes.
5. Responsible for being attentive and for appropriately participating in class activities.
6. Responsible for completing all class requirements as directed by the instructor.
7. Responsible for consulting with the instructor as soon as possible if problems arise.
8. Responsible for complying with official announcements.
9. Responsible for seeking appropriate support services to improve his/her level of academic achievement and to enhance the quality of college life.
10. Responsible for behaving in a humane and ethical manner both in the classroom and in all communication and contact with the instructor, other staff members, and other students.

additional notice: St. Louis Community College has a system to guide, counsel and assist students with disabilities: the Access Office on the second floor of Clark Hall. (Telephone Linda Nissenbaum at 984-7654.) Perhaps you have special needs, receive services from the Access Office, and needs special arrangements such as seating closer to the front of the class, a notetaker or any other approved accomodation. If so, please make an appointment during the first week of classes to speak with me. I will hold whatever you tell me in strictest confidence unless you give me permission to do otherwise.

tentative schedule

January 14 introduction to the course; tiny fiction and story samples (handouts)

January 16 from Russia: Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich

January 21 The Death of Ivan Ilyich continued; focus paper due

January 23 student choice of text: from England: Robert Louis Stevenson, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde OR from Poland/England: Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness

January 28 more on Stevenson or Conrad

January 30 film

February 4 from the U.S.A.: Edith Wharton, Edith Wharton

February 6 Short paper due, with basic idea to be presented orally in class: discuss the narrative "frame" around Ethan Frome: its technique, its effect, its meaning. You are free to bring in other "frames" in literature or film for purposes of comparison and clarification.

February 11 from Czechoslovakia: Franz Kafka The Metamorphosis

February 13 more Kafka

February 18 from the U.S.A.: William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying; focus paper due

February 20 more Faulkner

February 25 James Baldwin, Sonny's Blues (handout); endings to two short stories (handouts) due; discussion of plot and voice

February 27 from Colombia: Gabriel Garcia Marquez, The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother

March 4 more on Garcia Marquez; film: The Mystery of Rambo part 1

March 6 mid-term essays due; complete Rambo and discuss

spring break

March 18 discuss mid-term essays and any other matters; very short fiction appetizers (handouts); another appetizer: "The Japanese Tea Ceremony"

FROM JAPAN

March 20 Yukio Mishima, After the Banquet

March 25 film: Mishima, directed by Paul Schrader, music by Phillip Glass

March 27 service day for instructor; holiday for students

April 1 more on Mishima; two films about Kabuki theater; excerpt from Chinese film Farewell My Concubine

April 3 Fumiko Enchi, The Waiting Years; focus paper due

April 8 film version of The Waiting Years

April 10 more on Enchi; film on Japanese shadow puppets; contrast with excerpt from Chinese film To Live which centers on puppets

April 15 Natsume Soseki, Kokoro; focus paper due

April 17 more on Kokoro

From China

April 22 Yan Mo, Red Sorghum; focus paper due

April 24 film version of Red Sorghum

April 29 Zhang Xianliang, Half of Woman is Man

May 1 more on Half

May 6 Wang Weizheng, Recluse of the Heavenly House

May 8 more on Recluse; last day of class

Final essays are due at the exam time published in the spring 1997 course bulletin. We will decide together whether to see a feature film or otherwise use our final exam time.

Selected Annotated Bibliography for the Course

1)The best analytical and historical introduction to the novel--and most readable--remains Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative, by Peter Brooks (New York: Knopf, 1984). Full of ideas and vitality, it subsumes all the dull old "history of the Western novel" tomes--and also leaves them in the dust. It's equally suited for browsing or for a serious read, though students should read the beginning carefully to understand the novel's history--and Peter Brook's very special "take." The chapters on individual novels provide excellent models for how to have ideas about novels and to present them beautifully.

2)By far the best way to begin "getting into" Japan is Japanese Culture and Aesthetics: A Reader, edited by Nancy Hume (SUNY Press, 1995). Essays are far ranging and well-written--good for browsing as well as systematic, serious reading. Check out the table of contents for a topic that grabs you; then read the introduction and go on from there.

3)The best way "into" the Japanese novel in Origins of Modern Japanese Literature, by Karatani Kojin (Duke University Press, 1994). Beautifully written, its prose may command almost too much respect for those unused to literary criticism--though this is far from forbidding and impenetrable. Please persist. This book gives a fascinating look at how the Japanese novel looks to a highly educated and sensitive Japanese steeped in his own literary tradition, very well-read in the Western novel, and fully aware of Western and modernist influences on the art form.

4)The Dilemma of the Modern In Japanese Fiction, by Dennis C. Washburn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) is a book your instructor wishes she could have written. This highly readable book links the novel, the "most modern" art form other than film, with the whole Japanese "dilemma" of modernity. The Japanese feel uncomfortable being "modern," which they sometimes equate with being Western. This places their short novels in a completely different light. Realism, narrative structure, new forms (such as surrealism), and the identity of the writer become different issues in this different cultural context. A mind-blowing book and a real page-turner, this book begs to be read cover-to-cover. Enjoy!

5) A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, by C.T. Hsia (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971) is rather dated but extremely solid, informative and comprehensive. Its greatest strength is its analysis of the influence of Communism on literature. This will remain an important book even if China eases censorship of the arts. Its discussion raises many questions of the state's relationship to the arts--too little considered by Americans, perhaps, despite frequent attacks on the First Amendment.

6) Literature and the Arts, by China Handbook Editorial Committee (Beijing, Foreign Language Press, 1983) is a fascinating book. While C.T. Hsia analyses Communism's role in literature, this book gives the official party line. It's a real eye-opener. It also gives a short and accessible overview of Chinese literary history, linking it clearly with China's political history.

7) None But the Nightingale: An Introduction to Chinese Literature, by Margaret R. Thiele (Rutland, Vt. and Tokyo: Charles Tuttle, 1967) might be called dated, but it could also be called timeless. This is a marvelously readable book by a westerner which, clearly and reverently, seeks to reveal China's most precious treasures to a general audience. This is the book to read to understand China's past, particularly the persistence of "the old religion" alongside Taoism and then Buddhism. Thiele provides a rich context for understanding China's literary roots.

8) Chang Jung's Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China (Harper Collins, 1993) is a long but best-selling book about three generations of a Chinese family. They span feudalism, communism--and freedom to emigrate. This page-turner teaches much about China.

9) For those who would like to understand Japan and China more deeply there are wonderful books available. The best background books come from the marvelous and widely available hardback series: Japan: A Cultural Atlas and China: A Cultural Atlas. These texts are well-researched and written, full of maps and pictures. These books bring real understanding. Also note that the second floor of the Meramec Library (turn right at the top of the stairs) houses many fiction and non-fiction films about Asia that you can check out for seven days. Browse!

10) Another genre of travel book is geared toward the person planning a trip. Extensive reading in advance is essential, of course, to getting the most out of a trip. The Insight guides are excellent, with beautiful photographs and uneven maps. They are heavy, expensive paperbacks, meant to be read before a trip and not

taken along. Here's a suggestion: photocopy essential pages or take notes for your use on the trip. For the trip itself, go to Library, Ltd. for the best selection of travel books and language tapes in town. Look for a small, light, comprehensive book with good maps; there will be several to choose from, so suit your taste and needs. Unless you are already fluent, buy a little phrase book for the foreign language in which you will be immersed. There are some terrific books to prepare you, such as those offered in a delightful catalogue, The Literate Traveller (yes, the English spelling): phone 1-800-962-4943. Its pages offer literary guides for travelers to Japan and China (and other countries). There are also offbeat treasures such as Grayling and Whitfield's A Literary Companion: China. Such literary guides should be a pleasure to those who enjoy literature, since they enrich reading and cultural understanding--even if one stays at home.